



RICHARD RUSSELL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

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RICHARD RUSSELL

- Richard Russel was a democratic politician in the mid 1900's
- He served as governor for two years in 1931 before switching to Congress.
- Russell had a long career in congress serving for almost 40 years from 1933-1971



RICHARD RUSSEL (CONT.)



- Richard Russell served his tenure in Congress all the way until his death in 1971 due to emphysema
- His father was a former supreme court justice in the state of Georgia, so he was politically aware since birth
- Even though he was a democrat and strongly dislike the desegregation policies, he was one of the few southern democrats to attend meetings to their full
- Russell even had respect for his opponents, and remained faithful to his party even through differing opinions




RICHARD RUSSELL IN CONGRESS

- Richard Russell respected for his “long service and legislative skills, even among his opponents” (senate.gov).
- Throughout his time in Congress, he was known for his pro-segregation stances, even participating in filibusters to block Civil Rights Acts.
- His stance on segregation and the entire Civil Rights movement did not change for all 40 years.



DESEGREGATION IN LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

- One instance in which Russell displayed his contempt with Civil Rights was his response to the forced desegregation of school in Little Rock Arkansas.
 - In 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower used the National Guard to enforce desegregation.
 - This action was met with many critics, as using the National Guard for a matter like this was unprecedented
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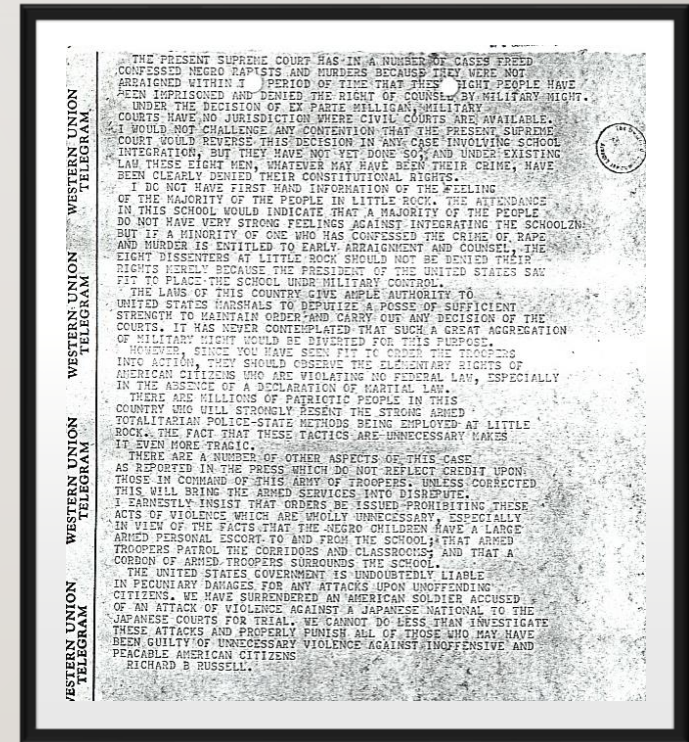


LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS (CONT.)

- One of the judges ruling on desegregation said the he had to weigh the options on whether to “buy peace in our time at the expense of discord in the next” (Liebman).
- Ultimately, all schools in America are desegregated in the present, and many would question why it did not happen sooner.
- However, back then these “simple” decisions had severe consequences, backlash from the public for Eisenhower, and potentially setting a bad precedent for the judges.

RUSSELL'S LETTER (CONT.)

- Russel continues to claim that citizens “who are violating no federal laws,” are being punished.
- His thinks that these are meant to be “tactics” to force desegregation, and that the idea of that is tragic.
- He believes it to be tragic that the United States government has fallen so far, that they would violate martial law to get their way



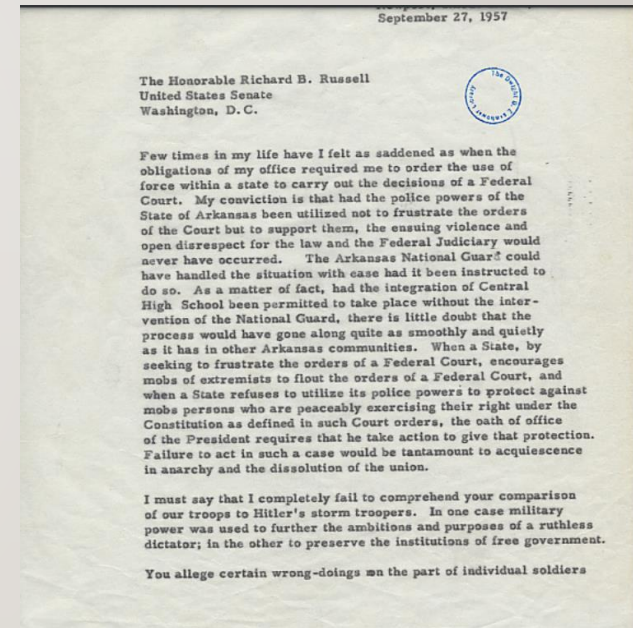


WHY THIS MATTERS

- Richard Russell's obvious discontent in this letter helps stabilize him as one of the leaders of the anti Civil Rights movement in the South.
- In the following years, as civil rights was at a peak, Richard Russell became synonymous with anti-desegregation
- Russell's letter helped him gain support from other Southern Senators who opposed the Civil Rights movement.
- The overall status of the Little Rock movement, set back Civil Rights, as many, including Russell, viewed it unjust or unconstitutional

LETTER FROM EISENHOWER TO RUSSELL

- Eisenhower replies to Russell very respectfully, even agreeing that the decision to use national force was difficult.
- He says that he has very rarely “felt as saddened” to have to order the use of force.
- He then explains that the situation could have been resolved more peacefully and less controversially if Arkansas police complied



EISENHOWER'S LETTER (CONT.)

- Although he agrees that the use of federal force was a hard choice, Eisenhower also fails to recognize Russell's comparisons to Nazi Germany
- Russell compares the use of national force to a Nazi Germany led by Hitler, and Eisenhower explains that the decision was one to protect the institution of free government.





LITTLE ROCK AFTERMATH

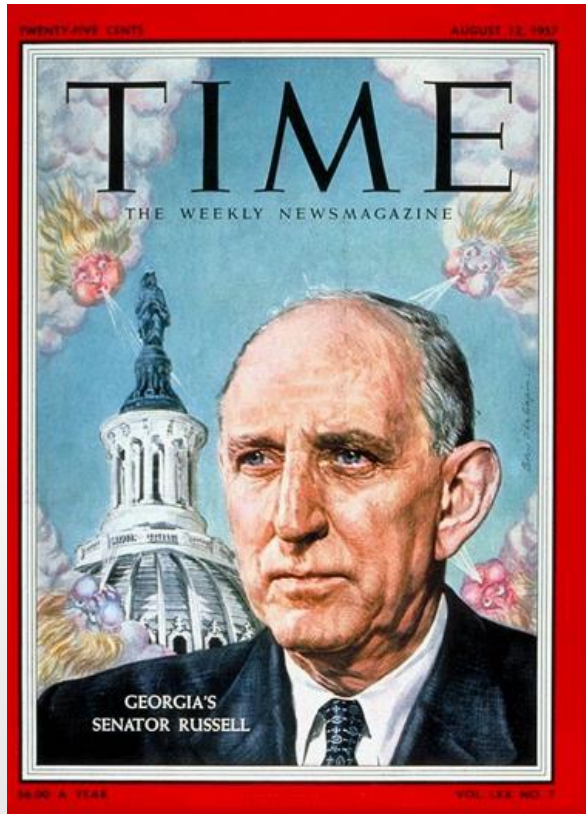
- Schools were closed for long periods of time and many citizens were upset
- The whole situation had many people in protest, and Eisenhower received backlash by many southerners in favor of segregation
- Richard Russell would soon become the face of Anti-Civil Rights and very publicly expressed his views

LETTER FROM MRS. SWEENY TO SENATOR RUSSELL



- In this letter, Mrs. Sweeny addresses her problems with the Civil Right's protestors, claiming their violence to be an issue to her safety and too America
- Mrs. Sweeny states in the letter that the violence is getting too much and that the "protestors" are asking for too much
- She expresses her concerns that if they get what they are asking for, what is stopping them from asking for more.

MRS. SWEENEY'S LETTER (CONT.)



- She shares this letter with Richard Russell because she knows that he will share the same views as her.
- As a longtime opponent to Civil Rights, Russell likely receives many letters like these, asking why the government doesn't stop the protestors.
- Mrs. Sweeney hopes that Russell will be able to do something, but as a majority of the Senate is in support of desegregation, many of the citizens "cries for help" will fall short



RUSSELL'S REPLY

- Russell replies to Mrs. Sweeny's letter with a long, thoughtful message that, in short, completely agreed with her
- In his reply he backs up her points and says that he wishes he could do something about it, and regrets that he can't.
- Since Russell is outmatched in Congress by numbers, he is never able to carry out his goals to set back the Civil Rights Movement

WHY DOES THIS MATTER



- His thoughtful reply to a random citizen shows just how dedicated he is to his own movement against Civil Rights.
- Russell likely received many of the messages, so a meaningful reply to the senders probably meant a lot to them, potentially strengthening the cause against desegregation.
- Although many Senators would reply with a thoughtless message saying that they appreciate their support, Richard Russell takes the time to write many paragraphs of support.

A black and white photograph of Richard Russell, a man in a suit and glasses, smiling and holding a football. He is standing on a football field with players in jerseys visible in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey layer.

OTHER LETTERS FROM RICHARD RUSSELL

- While Richard Russell takes the time to address support in length, he lacks in replies to people who share different viewpoints.
- One writer asked why he feels that African Americans cannot be equal to people like you and me.
 - Richard Russell replied with one short paragraph, essentially explaining that they can be equal, but there is nothing that says we can't be separate
- The differing response from this writer to Mrs. Sweeny accurately depicts how strong his feelings are, and that he really regrets not being able to do anything for people like her.



RICHARD RUSSELL'S OVERALL STANCE

- Looking at the multiple letters that Russell wrote, one can clearly see his passion and dedication to his beliefs
- Richard Russell worked until death, and he never budged on the issue of Civil Rights, heading the opposition for countless years.
- Overall, Richard Russell was a man who stuck to his principles, albeit morally wrong by today's standards, and led the opposition to Civil Rights into a hopeless battle

FURTHER SOURCES

WORKS CITED

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